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Belfast Chamber of Commerce

AND

MR. GLADSTONE.



A CONVINCING REJOINDER.

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BELFAST CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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A CONVINCING REJOINDER.

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, BELFAST,

11th April, 1893.

THE RIGHT HON. W. E. GLADSTONE, M.P.

SIR,—When you consented to receive a deputation from us we did not anticipate that pressure on your time would be so great that you could not give us the opportunity for discussion which we were disposed to think the importance of the subject required. In accordance with your suggestion we beg to submit the following reply :—

Before approaching any of the points to which you called attention in your speech, we beg to express our regret that you thought it right at the outset to make a marked reference to the religious composition of this chamber. On that point you appear to have informed yourself better than we have ever done. It never occurred to us to make such a census. All we know is that there are Roman Catholics amongst us, and that they, and members of any other religious persuasion, are equally welcome. As business men we are concerned with commercial affiliation, but we may venture

without offence, to hope that the time is distant when the religious views of the members of a deputation, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant, will be held to depreciate the value of their statements.

We note with regret that to much which we regard as important in our report you have avoided giving any answer whatever. We asked for "any definite statement of social or material improvements to Ireland likely to result from this Bill." To this request you made no reply. We pointed out that the only means towards such ends suggested by the Nationalist party indicate a system of bounties. This is heresy against free trade, but you have not repudiated that programme, and to our question, why we are to be driven from the position, and severed from the conditions which have made the success of our city possible, you vouchsafe no reply at all.

You have told us these men to whom we are opposed preach a doctrine of public plunder. Yet you have not offered the shadow of a reason to satisfy us that they will not use the powers with which you propose to entrust them to put those doctrines in force.

At the outset you challenged our statement that the amount collected by the Customs Department in Belfast for 1892 was £2,376,511, and by the Inland Revenue Department £900,000 more, making together £3,250,000. The exact classification of the revenue is not important; nevertheless, as you question our figures, we now append an official certificate of their substantial accuracy. (Somerset House Certificate, *vide* Appendix I.)

In reference to our statement that we shall be at the mercy of a majority which will have no real concern in the interests vitally affected, we venture to think that you wrest

it somewhat from its fair application. We were dealing with the commercial and industrial interests which we represent, as distinguished from the agricultural interests by which they are so largely out-numbered in Ireland. The proportion of rural to urban constituents, nearly equal in Great Britain, is almost six to one in this country. These inequalities can only find their correction and proper level by being merged in the representation of the United Kingdom.

You next challenge our statement of the existence of mutual historical jealousy in Ireland. We have purposely avoided anything but the most guarded reference to the differences which exist on the religious question. We have not uttered, and shall not be induced to utter, a word that could wound the susceptibilities of the Roman Catholics of this country, with whom we all earnestly desire to live on terms of peace and equality. What we did point to is the fact, to which no statesman should be blind, that there is most unhappily, a line of cleavage which goes deep down into the masses of the people, and by which they are radically divided. On this point we need only quote the words of Mr. Lecky, the greatest living historian of Ireland, to whom we thought right to submit your challenge. He says :—

“ The assertion that the Irish Catholics have never shown any jealousy to the Irish Protestants is of a kind which I find it difficult to characterise with proper moderation. Jealousy, unhappily, is far too feeble a word to describe adequately the fierce reciprocal animosity which has desolated Ireland for centuries. It blazed into a furious flame in the religious wars of Elizabeth, in the great rebellion of 1641, in the Jacobite struggle of 1689, in the religious war

into which the rebellion of 1798 speedily degenerated. These facts are about as conspicuous in the history of Ireland as Magna Charta and the Commonwealth in the history of England. To attribute, as Mr. Gladstone does, the whole blame to one side is simply to falsify grossly the truth of history. Happily for some years the hostility between the two creeds has been greatly subsiding, and a large number of Irish Catholics are among the most conspicuous and fervent supporters of the Union. No one who knows Ireland will deny that the policy of Mr. Gladstone has contributed more than any single cause to revive and deepen the division which every good Irishman deploras.' (Mr. Lecky's letter, 8th April, 1893, *vide* Appendix 2.)*

We offer no opinion as to who was right or who was wrong in those historic conflicts. We point only to the undeniable fact that again and again for centuries back Ireland has been divided to the last extremity of civil commotion, and even civil war, and always on the same lines. We live in this country, our information is derived from the daily experiences of life, and we know that whatever be the feelings of those whose education and training raise them above prejudice, the traditions of the country have left deep traces on both sides, to ignore which is surely neither statesmanlike nor wise.

When you refer to the end of the last century you speak of a period familiar to us all. We are the descendants of the Volunteers, and we inherit their traditions. We know what were their aims and aspirations. Like them we advocate equal civil and religious rights to every class and to every creed. Those rights for which they strove we have gained. As subjects of the United Kingdom we live now

* Issued separately as a leaflet by the Irish Unionist Alliance.

under a Parliament able and willing to treat every reasonable demand with justice and generosity. You are necessarily well aware that the Irish Parliament of which you speak had no point of similarity whatever to that which you now propose to establish. It was exclusively Protestant. Its electorate was Protestant. Until 1793 the sharp division of race and religion did not exist in it. Whatever good it may have accomplished was the work of Protestants, and we think when you accused us of a special jealousy you should have remembered that our ancestors granted the Parliamentary franchise to their Roman Catholic countrymen.

But we cannot accept the favourable view of the success of Grattan's Parliament, in support of which you quote Lord Clare speaking in 1798. The undoubted advance in the material prosperity of Ireland during the earlier years of that Parliament's existence was not attributable to its influence. It was due to causes in operation years before its independence, acquired in 1782, and altogether outside its sphere. Free trade with the colonies began in 1778, and some relaxation of the restrictions on trade with Great Britain was shortly afterwards obtained, largely through the influence of the Volunteers. But nothing contributed more to Irish prosperity than the war prices obtained during several years for agricultural produce both in Ireland and Great Britain. Wheat, for instance, advanced from 4s. 5½d. a bushel in 1780 to 14s. 1d. in 1800. These are the chief causes which tended to create that short-lived prosperity mentioned by Lord Clare—a prosperity which under the same regime soon gave place to the condition of affairs which led him in 1800 to paint the position of the country as absolutely desperate. "We have not three years'

redemption from bankruptcy or intolerable taxation—not one hour's security against the renewal of exterminating civil war." There was an increase of the Irish Government debt from £2,440,390 to £26,662,640 during the seven years between 1793 and 1800. From this state of affairs the Union saved us.

Your comparison of Ireland with Canada is wholly misleading. . . . The Dominion Parliament now includes representatives from Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, Manitoba, and the North-West Territories. The sharp division of race, language, and religion to which you refer is mastered and moderated by the preponderance of other interests which overspread the vast continent comprised in the Dominion. The million of Frenchmen in Quebec or the 1,900,000 Roman Catholics within the Dominion find their counterpoise in the other races and denominations contained in the five millions which constitute the Dominion population. The ascendancy of provincial majorities is thus absorbed in the representation of the whole Dominion, just as the ascendancy of the Irish majority is merged in the Parliament of the United Kingdom. The true Canadian analogy with an Ireland under Home Rule is to be found in the Province of Quebec, with its population of 1,000,000 French Catholics and 400,000 Protestants. Here we have a sample of a country ruled by a clergy whose pretensions have not been exceeded since the days of Thomas à Becket. The courts of law have shown themselves in well-known instances impotent to restrain the interference of ecclesiastical authorities with civil rights; in short, the supremacy of the Church is unquestioned. One-sixth of the provincial revenue of Quebec is applied to the

maintenance of ecclesiastical institutions. The provincial debt increases yearly. The exchequer is practically empty, and in order to make ends meet the commercial classes—notably those of Montreal—are subjected to special taxation.

The misleading character of your Canadian analogy is specially seen when we compare the powers of the Dominion Parliament with those of the proposed Irish Legislature. Under the Government of Ireland Bill Ireland is precluded from legislating regarding naval or military forces. Canada, as we have seen, not only enjoys this power, but possesses a militia of 38,000 and a large reserve. Ireland cannot meddle with foreign trade, quarantine, navigation, light-houses, currency and coinage, local tender, weights and measures, copyrights or patents. Canada has full power as to all these matters, and in addition has complete control of her customs, being able to levy protective duties at pleasure, even against the mother country, and to use her revenues as she thinks right. Her customs revenue is not impounded for Imperial purposes, as you propose to do with that of Ireland, and she contributes practically nothing to Imperial defence. It is superfluous to remind you that Canada is over 2,000 miles from Great Britain, and has never, like Ireland which is only a few hours apart, had representation in the Imperial Parliament. The comparison of Ireland with Canada in respect of resources is also most misleading. Ireland contains 32,531 square miles; Canada is over a hundred times as large, embracing 3,315,647 square miles. Ireland's mineral resources yield under £400,000 a year; Canada, which is only beginning to develop them, produced in 1889 minerals worth £3,900,000. The coal bed of Nova Scotia alone is said to cover an area

of 18,000 square miles. The imports of Ireland are £9,868,973; of Canada £24,650,885. The railways of Ireland have a capital of under £40,000,000, and carry annually 4,410,731 tons; those of Canada have a capital of £161,598,865, and carry 20,787,469 tons. The timber of Canada is worth over £8,000,000 sterling a year, and her resources in undeveloped agricultural land are apparently inexhaustible.

We pass to the calculations which you have placed before us in relation to the progress of Belfast on the hypothesis that the Union had not taken place, and we observe that you considered them sufficiently valuable to bring them before the deputation of the City of London which followed us on the day of our interview with you. We own that we are filled with amazement at the picture you have drawn. We say in reply that in the first place Lord Lansdowne, whom you quote, was on this subject not well informed. From the "Town Book of Belfast" we find that the number of houses in 1802, was 3,197, and the estimated population 19,001. There is no record for 1800, but it is manifest that your figure, 25,000, is far from correct. We find that in 1807 the number of houses was 3,514, and the population only 22,095. The basis of your calculation thus fails totally; and further we say that no town or city at any time, or in any place, ever increased by doubling its population every 18 years in geometric progression for 110 years, and that if your method were sound, and such progression probable and to be expected, it would follow that but for the Union Belfast would have had a population of five millions and a half before the middle of next century—a result so entirely absurd that it proves the whole reasoning fallacious. As a matter of fact the lowest rate of

increase that we can establish during the 110 years was the increase of 11 per cent. between 1791 and 1807; the highest was 41 per cent. between 1831 and 1841. One of the most extraordinary developments of a city is found in the case of Glasgow. In 1780 the population was 42,832, in 1801 it was 83,701. Applying your principle of increase to each period of twenty years, it should have reached over 1,500,000 in 1891. Remarkable as the increase has actually been it reached only 658,198. Glasgow has multiplied its population eight times between 1801 and 1891; Belfast in the same period has multiplied its population $13\frac{1}{2}$ times.

We come next to your remarks on finance. We are unable to share your sanguine hopes as to the saving of £2,500,000 by economies which you very slightly indicate. As merchants and manufacturers our expectations would be that the cost of management would increase in proportion as the establishment to be managed diminishes in size. The modern industrial tendency is towards consolidation of institutions in order to save expenses of management. Your proposal, on the other hand, is to divide a consolidated concern, and, contrary to all experience, you expect a saving to be thereby effected, and this in case of the weakest member of the dissolved partnership. Men of business do not risk all on analogies and metaphors. We want plain unmistakable facts. We want to have actual figures pointing to particular reductions, and the names of the particular offices and posts which you think can be abolished. There is a limit below which salaries cannot be cut down without disaster. As business men we know that miserable pay leads to miserable work. We do not think an Irishman of first-class ability will be induced to stay in Ireland discharging duties on a salary regulated by

the exigencies of the Exchequer, when he can compete in England for positions open to him as a subject of the Empire. Our men of ability already leave us daily for the higher prizes offered elsewhere. We do not want to lose them all, and to be served by those only who can do no better. Moreover, we may ask if the extravagance is really so enormous, why has it been permitted to continue, not only by the four Cabinets of which you were head, but also by all Governments of all political views?

But with great respect we challenge your figures altogether. The civil expenditure of Ireland per head is not twice the civil expenditure of Great Britain per head. This is a mere question of arithmetic which we are as competent to solve as any statesman. The civil expenditure of Great Britain is 19s. 2d. per head. The figures are simply taken from last returns—

| | | |
|---------------------------|--------|-------------|
| Population—Great Britain | ... | 33,026,000 |
| „ Ireland | | 4,704,000 |
| Expenditure—Great Britain | ... | £31,685,847 |
| „ Ireland | | £5,644,138 |
| Per head—Great Britain | ... | £0 19s. 2d. |
| „ Ireland | | £1 4s. 0d. |

But in this calculation the Irish charge includes the police, the special charges under the Land Act, and the Education vote. These items form 11s. per head of the total. We know that the like charges in Great Britain in reality do not correspond. These services are there largely supplemented by local rates. The charge for them in Government expenditure is only 4s. per head. The comparison you have made is not only based on figures which are perfectly wrong, but it is instituted without securing that

the totals shall include exactly the same items. The true comparison can only be arrived at by eliminating these charges from both accounts. Then the expenditure per head for England will appear at 15s. 2d. per head, after deducting 4s., and the expenditure for Ireland will be 13s. after deducting 11s. The excess in Ireland so far as it exists, and is not the result of miscalculation, arises from bringing into the account as against us, expenses provided otherwise in the account against Great Britain. We think this is quite sufficient to show that your estimated economy is quite impossible.

Nevertheless, assume that your economy of £2,500,000 were made, from what items is it to be taken? The total amount of the expenditure side of your budget is £5,160,000. After your reductions of £2,500,000, there would be an available balance of £2,660,000, but the education vote is £1,060,000. That cannot be reduced. The Post Office service is £790,000, the collection of revenue is £160,000—these cannot be reduced. The amount together is about £2,000,000. There would then remain only £660,000 to meet Governmental expense for Police and Land Act charges (at present estimated to cost £1,556,416), for grants in aid of local charges (at present upwards of £800,000 yearly), for salaries of judges and all officials, and for all other purposes whatever. It is inconceivable to us how anyone can talk of a “chronic plethora of money” in presence of these facts. The idea is a mere dream.

We think we have met fairly by actual statements of facts, by figures, and by authoritative quotations everything you urged against our report. We are not shaken in our views. We still see nothing to expect from this Bill

but confusion and disaster. We are bound to warn you that its enactment would be but the beginning of a new struggle, and a break up of social order which no force in this country could control, and the end of which no man can foresee.

You state towards the close of your remarks that the Irish policy of England, from 1800 till 1885, has failed. Your Home Rule policy is, therefore, a policy of despair. We submit that no stronger condemnation of such a pessimist policy can be produced than your admission that the Imperial Parliament has not failed so far as Ulster is concerned. Not the least earnest Unionists amongst us to-day are descendants of the rebels of 1798. No law exists which gives Ulster men a scintilla of advantage over their brethren of the other provinces. Is it not, therefore, a more worthy statesmanship to have patience and to believe that the same even-handed and beneficent legislation which has produced peace, contentment, and loyalty in the Northern province will ultimately bear the same happy fruit throughout the remainder of the island? Imperial legislation has not had time to bear its legitimate and natural fruit, and the most far-reaching of it all—that which lies at the root of the Irish difficulty—the adjustment of the land question, is only in the infancy of its operation.

We ask you to say whether Imperial reforms have received fair play at the hands of the Nationalist leaders. Have they co-operated in rendering any beneficial measure successful? Have they not rather crushed the best interests of our country by persistent and avowed attempts to render the Government of Ireland under its present Constitution impossible. We claim that the case for

failure is not made out until the Nationalists themselves have honestly done their best to govern Ireland under existing conditions. The opportunity was never more favourable. Nationalist members constitute almost one-fourth of your followers in Parliament, and without them your majority would be gone. It would be only natural to expect that on the recognised principle of Constitutional Government, their leaders, if worthy to be trusted with the conduct of an Irish Government, should have places in your present Administration, and, as men responsible to Parliament, should share in framing and administering your policy both towards Ireland and the Empire.

Till they have given the resources and the Constitution a fair trial, neither you nor they have a right to say that these resources have proved inadequate.

You say we are not the Irish people. We do not claim to be, but we assert that the deliberate convictions of at least one-third of the Irish people would find due expression in the Parliamentary representatives of Ireland but for the anomalies and inequalities in the electorate, which you yourself have admitted. We also assert that our opinions as to the advantages of the Union are making way in Ireland, and we maintain that it is unstatesmanlike and unjust to break up in haste and in despair the Constitution under which so large a proportion of the Irish people have prospered.

You call your policy conservative, on the grounds that it goes back to the arrangements of the last decade of the last century. May not we claim for our policy the same distinction and in a higher degree, because it embodies the repeated demands for legislative union made by the Irish Parliament in the first decade of that century? Does the

lesson of the past not justify the foresight and wisdom of our fathers in the days of Queen Anne, who saw in the union with Scotland the pattern of Ireland's right relation to her wealthy neighbour? Again we ask of you, give Ireland time. The wrongs of centuries are not to be healed in a moment. We submit the time-lesson of history is this—The policy of legislative union, which has succeeded in the case of Scotland, and which has succeeded as regards not the least important section of the people of Ireland, is the policy which, if patiently continued, will yet bring peace to our beloved and divided country.

(Signed on behalf of the Chamber of Commerce)

JOHN GREENHILL, President.
R. L. PATTERSON, Hon. Sec.

APPENDIX I.

INLAND REVENUE.

Somerset House, London, W.C.,
29th March, 1893.

SIR,—With reference to your letter of the 21st inst. I am directed by the Board of Inland Revenue to furnish you with the following particulars of the receipts of duties in Belfast in the year 1892, as requested:—

By Inland Revenue collected—

| | |
|----------------------|----------------|
| Excise | £627,933 |
| Income Tax | 99,866 |
| Stamp Duties* | 100,928 |
| | ————— £828,787 |

By Customs collected—

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Customs Duties... .. | £978,475 |
| Inland Revenue Spirit Duties | 1,397,955 |
| | ————— 2,376,430 |

Total £3,205,217

—I am, sir, your obedient servant,

(Signed)

ROBERT MICKS, Secretary.

Samuel Vance, Esq.

* The Death Duties cannot readily be distinguished.

